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Sens. Stamas, Jelinek introduce legislation to create Michigan's own 'Imagination Library'

LANSING – Legislation to implement a program that provides books to children five years of age and younger, and helps promote early childhood literacy was introduced in the Michigan Senate today, said Sens. Tony Stamas and Ron Jelinek.

"If we want our children to grow up and become productive, contributing members of society then we must make sure they obtain a quality education," said Stamas, R-Midland. "The most important thing we can do to make sure that happens is to provide them with books and encourage them to read, and develop a love for learning."

Sponsored by Stamas, Senate Bill 1174 will establish an "Imagination Library" grant program in Michigan. Children enrolled in the program will receive a children's book in the mail once a month from the time they are born until their fifth birthday.

SB 1175, sponsored by Jelinek, will set aside \$1 million to fund the program that will allow intermediate school districts to apply for a state grant that requires a local 50 percent match.

Intermediate school districts can then disburse the money to local school districts, local units of government, private foundations and non-profit organizations. Areas most in need of this type of program will receive priority when grants are awarded.

"Encouraging young children to read is an important step in helping them become great students and productive workers," said Jelinek, R-Three Oaks. "Having a continuous book program early on will allow parents to first read to their children and transition them to reading on their own as they get older. As a former educator, I see this program being highly beneficial to Michigan."

The Imagination Library program was originally started by Dolly Parton through the Dollywood Foundation.

Currently, the Bay-Arenac and Berrien County intermediate school districts, Van Buren Public Schools, Midland County Educational Service Agency, and the United Way of Eaton and Allegan counties are involved in the program.

The state of Tennessee operates a statewide program.

Children in Michigan have received books such as "The Very Hungry Caterpillar," "Good Night Gorilla," "Corduroy Goes to the Doctor," and "Aesop's Fables."